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**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, TOULON, ILLINOIS,  
1846-1921.**

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**The Story of Seventy-Five Years in the Congregational  
Church of Toulon, Illinois.**

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BY CLARE MCKENZIE.\*

Our first definite information of Congregationalism in Stark County, Illinois, is gained from the Journal of the ministerial labors of Rev. S. G. Wright in this County and at outlying points. Rev. Wright was sent out by the Home Missionary Society, and was evidently in the employ of both the Congregational and the Presbyterian Church, with directions to found which ever church seemed best adapted to the community in which he labored. As early as 1840, there is frequent mention in this diary of preaching at LaFayette, Wethersfield, Walnut Creek and other points.

His first home among us was in West Jersey Township, in those days known as the Webster settlement or "Nigger's Point," near the southern county line. In this vicinity, somewhere, he seems to have ministered to a Presbyterian church of very early date, possibly as early as 1839 and quite probably as early as 1841. Leeson's "History of Stark County" refers to the founding of a Congregational Church of Rochester just over the Peoria County line, which he says, was orga-

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\* The dates in this little sketch are of two kinds, probable and certain. I have found in examining the various histories of Stark County and its organizations that they sometimes disagree as to the date on which such and such an event occurred. I have, therefore, asserted certainty of the dates I mention here only when I could myself trace them back to some authentic written record, made in the time in which the events in question occurred and bearing the signature of some person who witnessed them, that is, no date is put down here as positive which is based on reminiscence only. When I take a date from some historian or some reminiscence I mention the source of my information, but make no assertions of authenticity in such a case. When I refer to a date as possible or probable I have good reason for thinking it fairly accurate, but here again I do not assert certainty; for such dates I have not been able to prove.

CLARE MCKENZIE.

nized in 1841 in the house of Elias Wycoff and was known as the Spoon River Congregational Church; this may have been a Presbyterian Church, however, as it appears from the "Journal" that a Presbyterian Church of this West Jersey settlement voted on January 28, 1847, to change its constitution and become Congregational. If such a Church existed as Congregational from the very beginning, it undoubtedly had members in both Stark and Peoria Counties. It seems likely that the history of two churches of these early settlements, in what is now West Jersey Township, have been confused or else the history of one church has become so mixed that this one church appears as two. At any rate, whatever the explanation, it does not seem likely that Rev. S. G. Wright would have been connected at the same date with two churches so near together and so much alike as Presbyterian and Congregational churches are, especially since he seems to have been in the employ of both denominations.

Congregational influence at LaFayette is more certain. A Presbyterian Church of LaFayette apparently dates its organization as a Presbyterian Church from 1841, with the coming of Rev. S. G. Wright, who labored there several years, although a Presbyterian body of some sort existed there as early perhaps as 1837 or 1839. In February, 1847, this Church voted to change its constitution and become Congregational. Both this LaFayette Church and the Church or Churches of the West Jersey settlement have long ago ceased to exist.

It therefore appears that the Toulon Church, dating from 1846, and Congregational from the beginning, is the oldest Congregational Church which is still in existence in Stark County, and it is also very probably, in the light of the facts just mentioned, the first one of this denomination founded in the County. Among the Churches in Toulon, it is either the first or second to be established. The Toulon Methodist Church is also very early and was probably organized in this same year, 1846, but the day and the month of its founding seem to be unknown, and the writer of this sketch has been unable, so far, to find an official written record of the year of its establishment. It seems quite probable that the two churches, Methodist and Congregational, were as

nearly simultaneous in the time of their organization as two churches very well could be.

For some years previous to its organization and some years after, its history is very intimately connected with the personal history of its founder, Rev. S. G. Wright. Rev. Wright was a pioneer in more ways than one and gave many of the best years of his life to Stark County as preacher, pastor, lecturer, school commissioner and citizen. According to Mrs. Shallenberger's "History of Stark County and Its Pioneers," he was born in New Hampshire in 1809, and settled in 1832 in Fulton County, Illinois, where he engaged in farming for a while; he then entered Lane Seminary to prepare himself for the ministry, graduating in 1840, and a little later he was commissioned by the Home Missionary Society to labor in this vicinity.

From his "Journal" we learn that for the first few years he had regular appointments at the following named places: Walnut Creek (at different points), Victoria, Henderson, Wethersfield, LaFayette, Wyoming, Osceola, Wall's Schoolhouse, Moulton and later at Toulon, and contiguous points, many meetings being held at private houses, prominent among them, of this vicinity, being Mr. Hugh Rhodes' and Mr. Nicholson's. "In 1842," writes Mrs. Shallenberger, "he preached one hundred and seventy sermons and travelled 2,166 miles. In 1843, he preached two hundred sermons and rode 2,353 miles, administered the sacrament nine times, received seventeen into fellowship with the Church. In 1844, he preached one hundred and eighty-one sermons, and travelled 3,103 miles.

"This he characterizes as 'a barren, barren year, fraught with many discouragements.' Still he continued to labor even more abundantly, and outside of this strictly ministerial work, he lectured frequently upon reforms and scientific subjects, giving temperance and anti-slavery addresses without number, also astronomical lectures, broaching among other things, the then new 'Nebular theory' of creation, hoping thus, as he says, 'to open the eyes of the understanding, that men might be induced to listen to God's word by a consideration of his works.' Who can measure the influence of such a man in moulding public sentiment in the then new and plastic

condition of our community? And this work was performed at the cost of personal discomfort and self-denial, both to himself and family that would appall people nowadays. As to salaries, he says: 'The Home Missionary Society helped in some cases to raise them to \$400 per annum, but this was only for a favored few. My salary for the first twelve years of my missionary life averaged about \$300 per year.' 'No wonder,' his wife writes, 'we did not live but only endured in those days.'

"Mr. Wright bore a great deal of what we may now call persecution and unmerited obloquy for his devotion to anti-slavery principles, being rather the standard bearer of the old 'liberty party' in this county. He never shrank from the odium incurred, for his own sake, but rather rejoiced that he was deemed worthy to suffer for the oppressed; but when it interfered with his usefulness as a minister of Christ, and thinned his congregations, then came many a painful struggle, as to where lay the path of duty, and many a heartfelt prayer for Divine direction. Then his interest for the temperance reformation and against the prevalent practice of 'timber hooking' made him some enemies. Men did not brook reproof then, any better than now and he could not let wrong doing go unproved; so there was a time when many railed at him, but he swerved not, remembering probably, 'woe unto thee when all men speak well of thee.' "

\*But a series of extracts from his diary will give a better idea than anything else of his life of toil and self-sacrifice in these pioneer days:

"December 24th, 1841—Started for Walnut Creek; there had been a great rain, the creek was swimming; Richard and William Dunn were with me; had much difficulty in crossing the branch above Trickle's mill; had to break ice for near an hour, and to go round by Fraker's grove, in order to get to the bridge below Centerville; preached at Mr. Foster's Friday evening, etc., etc.

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\* These quotations are from copies of extracts from the original "Journal," some of them copies made by Rev. Alfred C. Wright, son of Rev. S. G. Wright, who has the original "Journal" in his possession, and sent by him to the writer of this sketch, and some of them are from Mrs. Shallenberger's copy, who seems to have had access to the original "Journal" when she wrote her history.

"January 17th, 1842—Last Tuesday gave another astronomical lecture at Rochester; it was very muddy, yet the house was well filled, mostly with men, who gave close attention. Thursday, went to Princeville; very few came out to hear the temperance lecture, and only four signed the pledge; on my way back, found Spoon River over its banks for a quarter of a mile or more, and the ice too thick to break; went back to Rochester and there made out to cross the river. Saturday evening gave an astronomical lecture to a full house at La-Fayette; Sunday morning preached, and in the evening lectured on temperance; twenty-four signed the pledge, in all sixty-two at this place.

"January 31st, 1842—Find I have attended evening meetings for ten successive nights; feel the need of rest to keep health; can't bear everything, though I should love to hold meetings seven times a week, while I live.

"February 7th—Came into collision with Mormons on Walnut Creek.

"April 18th—Went to Knoxville to attend the debate between Kinney and Frazer, also to obtain a teacher, which I effected.

"May 2d—Went to LaFayette to hear Mr. Harris expose Mormonism; rehearsed his lecture to my people at Mr. Webster's. Last week preached but twice; ploughed the rest of my field, and sowed four and a half bushels of oats.

"May 9th—Went for the first time to Osceola, preached in the morning to a large and attentive audience; in the evening delivered a temperance lecture, following Captain Butler.

"May 23d—Preached at James McClennahan's in the heart of the Mormon settlement; hope good was done.

"June 6th—Formed a Sabbath school; borrowed forty-nine volumes from the Osceola school.

"August 1st—Meeting of the association; circumstances rather disheartening; hurry of harvest, heavy rains, etc.; cold and damp in the barn where we met, as it was not all enclosed.

"August 22d—Worked at getting stone for a well, and harvesting my oats; preached twice on Sabbath.

“There is a great effort to destroy the influence of this church by reporting that we are abolitionists, and have formed lines for helping runaways, hence are as bad as horse thieves.

“Many are highly prejudiced against us, and what the end will be, the Lord only knows. We are conscientiously engaged in doing to others as we would that they should do unto us; and if this will injure the cause of Christ in the long run, we are deceived. True, it is very unpopular, and many that would otherwise attend the preached word and Sabbath school stay away. Lord give us the wisdom of serpents and the harmlessness of doves. Some of the Church are also offended; Lord restore them.

“September 14th—Went to Henderson and Galesburg; made arrangements for a meeting at LaFayette; at Knoxville was hindered all the next day endeavoring to get relief for five colored persons who were that day imprisoned because they could not produce full evidence that they were free.

“October 3d—Went to Walnut Creek; found very many sick, bilious fever prevailing; many also are sick in our neighborhood with whom I spent much time last week.

“November 18th—Last week I went to Galesburg to attend the association; no minister present but myself. Preached four successive days, and was detained two days longer by the severity of the weather. How soon I can return I know not, as the snow is badly drifted and the wind yet high and cold.

“November 30th—Went to Farmington to attend the sitting of presbytery; detained there two days; then went to Ellisville and preached to a few hearers, twenty-five or thirty, from a population of one hundred and fifty. How has the gold become dross? Two years ago it was said all Ellisville was converted. From Ellisville went to Swan Creek. The country is fast filling up; where six years ago everything was in a state of nature as far as the eye could see, now farms are seen in all directions, and many little towns are springing up. Preached five times at Swan Creek.

“December 5th—Shall endeavor to hold meetings at Toulon or vicinity every eve of the days I preach at LaFayette.

“December 24th—Attended the first meeting for mutual improvement at Knoxville; also the other association, indeed had a prominent part in it, but was compelled to tear myself away as my house and family needed my attention, for it is very cold and our house has neither doors nor floors.

“I have spent all the week at hard work, and we have just got the lower floor laid, the doors in, and the upper floor battened a little.

“January 4th, 1843—Early on Monday morning a daughter was born to us, and as it was the day of fasting and prayer for the conversion of the world, in the afternoon I preached a sermon.

“January 23d—Preached at Toulon on the Sabbath, in the Court House which had just been received from the builders by the County Commissioners. There was no fire in the house and it was a chilly day; still there were perhaps sixty in attendance, and I left another appointment in four weeks.

“February 6th—Last week had much severe cold weather; had to be at home most of the week; read “Horne’s Introduction,” etc. On Friday another fugitive from slavery came along, making twenty-one that have passed through this settlement on their way to Canada. Today it is extremely cold, the ink freezes in my pen as I try to write beside the stove.

“February 20th—Did not go to Toulon, am almost sick from cold, my horse is lame, and it is too cold to hold meeting in the Court House without fire.

“May 22d, 1843—Last week was at home most of the time; planted potatoes, corn, etc., visited families; hope some good was done. Saturday, went to the Emery settlement, but found so strong an antipathy against abolitionists that but few would hear me preach, so I went on, and on Sabbath morning preached at Toulon to a large congregation; most of the seats filled. Report said the Mormons meant to encounter me here and draw me into a debate, but all passed off quietly.

“May 20th—The grand jury found a bill against me, and my Elder, W. W. Webster, for harboring runaway slaves! Some excitement exists, but hope good will result. Many sym-



pathize with us and with the oppressed, who had seldom thought on the subject before; and these wicked laws 'to be hated need but to be seen.' Rev. Owen Lovejoy, of Princeton, is also indicted. We have not yet been taken by the sheriff, but probably shall be soon.

"August 14th—Last week worked three days at harvesting. Much sickness around. Our election took place, and I believe there were eleven liberty votes cast in the county; last year there were but two!

"September 11th—Last week went to Wethersfield, Toulon, LaFayette and Walnut Creek. Find much to be done.

"September 25th—Went to the neighborhood of Toulon and preached at Mr. Nicholson's. Sabbath morning preached at Toulon to about sixty, p. m. at LaFayette to about fifty, and evening to only thirty as it was raining.

"October 23d, 1843—Sabbath at Toulon; many Mormons came expecting a champion to attack me; there were a number of their elders present; I fully expected an attack, but they did not see fit to make one; probably waiting to get a big gun for the assault.

"November 20th, 1843—Last week had the house plastered; had to attend mason myself, etc., etc. For five weeks have been to work almost constantly about home, trying if possible to get the house comfortable to winter in. It has been almost insupportable, especially for the children. Never since I began to labour in the ministry have I had, until now, a house with more than one room in it, which has had to answer for kitchen, parlor, bedroom, closet, etc. My sermons have all been prepared in the midst of the confusion of cooking, care of children and company! Now by the blessing of God, I have a room for retirement and study.

"December 13th—Last week worked at getting wood; got a good supply for the winter; preached five times; rode seventy-five miles; went to Knoxville to give information to the committee on home missions; got horse shod and wagon repaired.

"May 20th, 1844—Heard there was to be an informal meeting by Presbytery at Knoxville, and went, returning the next day in the rain. Sabbath rainy, but preached twice; we

have more rain than ever before; creeks are all full, bridges gone, the earth perfectly saturated with water, sickness beginning to prevail, lung fever especially.

"May 24th—Last week court sat; no complaint against 'Nigger stealers' this time; court held but one day. Tuesday went to Mr. Rhodes' and to LaFayette to make arrangements for a convention and debate on Friday; Friday went to Toulon to attend the convention; W. J. Frazer and Esq. Kinney debated with James H. Dickey and O. P. Lovejoy, upon the principles and practices of liberty party. The debate held from 2 p. m. till 5, and from 7 till 3 a. m. No decision was taken either by judges or vote; but we think the negative established nothing. It rained hard all night and in the morning creeks were almost impassable. In crossing a little branch between Mr. Silliman's and Hugh Rhodes' the water was so deep that my wagon uncoupled and the hind parts floated off, and I went out with the fore wheels, well wet.

"June 10th, 1844—Last week started with wife and two daughters for Knoxville, Galesburg, Victoria, etc. Wednesday evening at Knoxville a most dreadful storm of wind, hail, rain and lighting broke over us; several houses were unroofed and one new two-story house was upset and dashed to fragments. In it were a mother and three children; one child dangerously hurt. The storm raged from Galesburg to Spoon River, how much farther we know not. It seemed for many minutes impossible that the house in which we were could withstand its force. Mr. Cole was absent and no man was present but myself. There seemed but a step between us all and death. God alone could understand our feelings. The lightning was almost constant, and in many places seemed to be running all over the ground; persons riding in wagons saw the wheels apparently encircled with fire. This occurred on the 5th of June, 1844. Streams are all swimming, bridges gone, roads dreadful, still raining.

"June 24th—Went to Knoxville as a witness for Rev. Mr. Cross, in the case of the People vs. Cross for harboring slaves; at length a nolle prosequi was entered and I returned home. On Friday, went to Farmington to attend a convention for organizing a general association for the State. The

constitution was changed in divers places, and the confession of faith slightly altered; strong resolutions passed on the subject of slavery.

“July 2d, 1844—Last week went to LaFayette and Toulon to hear the candidates for congress speak. After Mr. Cross, the liberty candidate had spoken, Col. W. H. Henderson delivered himself of a speech against abolitionists in general and ministers in particular. At Toulon also, he expressed the same sentiments, only was more personal. He warned the people against all sorts of abolitionists, said they would destroy the country; slavery was a great curse but God would remove it without human instrumentality. Warned all not to hear abolition preachers; he would not hear one preach, sing or pray; neither should his children go to our Sabbath school; warned the children not to believe what such preachers said; he would say to the gentleman whom he had in his eye, we don't want him, he can go back to the East where he came from; I never heard him and never will. If he comes here let him talk to empty seats, etc.

“August 12th—Last week went to election; brought down the bibles from LaFayette; stacked my oats; went to see Mrs. Nicholson, (who is dying of cancer); marked the bibles, prepared two sermons; on Sabbath preached twice, and rode sixty-five miles during the week.

“September 23d—Last week worked at home most of the time; threshed my oats, dug my potatoes, waited on the sick; my wife has fever and ague.

“September 30th—Was at home the former part of the week reading, etc. Thursday went to visit Mrs. McClenahan and Mr. Rhodes. Friday attended to business for the bible society at Toulon; got medicine for my wife of Dr. Hall; went home and administered it. Saturday went to LaFayette and preached preparatory lecture.

“July 8th, 1845—Monday, attended an adjourned discussion of anti-slavery principles at Toulon. I regret to be obliged to enter this field, others ought to do it; but if they will not, shall I be silent? Would it please God? Would conscience leave me at ease? I pray God to guide me in this matter, and if I misapprehend my duty, may I know it.

“January 24th, 1846—Last week made arrangements for a preaching field, which will be Stark County only. Gave a lecture on capital punishment at Toulon; went to Walnut Grove and preached on Wednesday evening, and on Monday evening a temperance lecture; thence to Galesburg to attend examinations.

“February 2d, 1846—Went to LaFayette; found a Methodist meeting which had continued for nineteen days with good success; a spirit of union seemed to prevail. I was invited to preach, which I did; then went to Toulon and Wyoming to arrange appointments; I am met by a good degree of cordiality, that shows prejudice has greatly abated. Sabbath at Toulon; the prospect is flattering as compared with former times.

“February 9th, 1846—Last week went to Galesburg to attend the installation of Brother Kellogg; was unexpectedly called to give the charge to the people. After preaching we had a conference of brethren in reference to uniting our Presbytery and Central Association in a sort of convention, so there would be one and not two bodies.

“June 26th—Left the association contrary to their vote, to fill appointments on the Sabbath. Preached at Toulon to a full house, from the text, ‘no weapon formed against thee shall prosper.’ At Wyoming from the same. Next day spent with Dr. Castle reading ‘Spooner’s works.’

“Tuesday, went to Galesburg to attend the commencement exercises of Knox College. They were quite flattering to the institution. Mr. Blanchard, however, so far forgot the spirit of the age, and of the West as to appear in a toga, and to wear his hat, etc., etc., while giving his inaugural address.

“August 25th—Had a long interview with Captain Butler. The Captain is something of a Unitarian, but likes Walker’s book on the philosophy of the plan of salvation pretty well, but thinks Walker fails to recognize one fact, viz.: ‘penalty precedes protection.’ If he could see the fallacy of this his theory would be sapped.

“August 31—Last week wrote a letter covering two sheets, to Captain Butler, trying to expose the fallacy of his

dogma, 'penalty precedes protection;' also attended upon sick neighbors considerably.

"On Saturday, preached another funeral sermon. Sunday morning preached from I Corinthians XV, 24-28, showing that the mediatorial key is given up at the resurrection, and that afterwards there can be no restoration to happiness or favor. P. M. found the sickness still increasing about Moulton; but few out in consequence. Just at the close of services, word came that wife was sick, so I returned immediately; shall visit here again as soon as wife's health permits; she has a fever but hope nothing serious.

"Wednesday, September 15th—Was called to attend a funeral at the residence of Mr. Buswell, of a little boy who had suffered greatly from stricture of the bowels. The family are deeply afflicted. Saturday I had an attack of fever myself; was better on Sunday, so I preached twice, but have been very weak ever since.

"September 26th—Tried to gain a little strength by cutting corn; am some better, went to Victoria. Came home on Monday; found Edward had been taken sick all alone at home; wife and daughters were with me; wife hardly able to sit up; thought riding might benefit her; Edward had a high fever which held him till Wednesday morning; came on again on Thursday morning with great violence. The girls, too, have both suffered similar attacks though not so severe. We have had work hands all week finishing off the chambers, so all week could do no more than wait on the sick and help wife about the house.

"Saturday expected to deliver a preparatory lecture at the Court House in Toulon, but found that sickness had been so severe there, that hardly any of the brethren could attend; postponed it for four weeks. The health of my family is improving. The amount of sickness is unparalleled, although not very fatal.

"October 17th, 1846—Started for synod at Belvidere; took wife and daughters to Henry, to stay with Brother Pendelton's wife, while he and I go to synod in company. As we went north, found sickness ever more severe than at home.

Absent twelve days; family still suffering from intermittent fever; Edward on his bed, and the little girls unable to ride.

"Saturday, October 24th—Still find much to do at home on account of sickness in my family and among the neighbors. Have been all this morning feeding and picking corn for Mr. A. A. Dunn, who is confined to his bed. This is the third time I have been to help him this week.

"I have studied none and spent but little time in private devotions of late, but trust I have been in the path of duty, nevertheless.

"November 6th, 1846—Had a good meeting at Brother Hugh Rhodes', persons from different parts of the county. They agreed it was best that I should remain and proceed to organize a Congregational Church in Toulon the last Sabbath of the month.

"December 1st—On Sabbath (November 29th) Brother Parker was with me at Toulon and we organized a church of nine members. It was a solemn time. The house was full and I hope a good impression was made.

"January 5th, 1847—Went to attend the ordination of Brother Blanchard at Knoxville; very muddy bad roads. Arriving at home on Friday evening, found two fugitives from slavery had been along with only 'Christmas papers.' Messrs. Smith and Gordon of Farmington pursued, got out a search warrant for two stolen horses and two colored men who were supposed to have stolen them. Neither horses nor men were described except that one man called himself 'Major.' They searched our premises in vain, however, for the birds had flown, having got a wink from friends at Farmington that they were pursued. Several constables and others followed them to Osceola, but before they reached there, the fugitives were safely out of the county.

"October 13th, 1847—Last week attended the meeting of the Association at Groveland; it was a pleasant and profitable time; we have now eleven ministers and eighteen churches—more than Knox Presbytery ever had.

"October 28th, 1847—Monday, returned to Toulon, bought six and a half acres of land. Had my horse shod by Ford, who said he would take nothing but preaching for

his work. He is doubtless a wicked man, but I must visit in his family and try to do them good.

"November 25th, 1847—Visited Mr. McWilliams and was invited to preach at his house. Same evening married Miss Eliza Rhodes and C. M. S. Lyon.

"March 27th, 1848—This week occupied pretty much in removing to Toulon and fixing things there."

It will be noticed from the above extracts that Rev. Wright, in addition to his exertions on behalf of anti-slavery and temperance, also did battle with the Mormons who flourished in the County about 1841-1846 and were a serious menace to morality, finding converts oftentimes where they would be least expected. He is said to have won many of these converts back again to the orthodox faiths, and he undoubtedly checked the further advance of this pernicious influence considerably. It is well for all the orthodox denominations that followed, therefore, that a man of such good common sense and intellectual and spiritual sanity was here, at such an early date, as a staying power, among all the trials and temptations and intellectual barrenness of the isolated pioneer life, and a steady influence for the things that are of eternal worth.

Besides his duties as preacher, pastor, and lecturer, Rev. Wright also made his influence felt in the matter of schools. From his first residence in the County, he interested himself in procuring competent teachers and boarded many of them in his own family at rates to suit the small salaries paid. Leeson gives these facts regarding his service to education: As early as 1849, he was one of a committee to receive subscriptions and make plans for the establishment of a Seminary in Toulon and became one of its first Board of Trustees. He was elected school commissioner in 1850 and re-elected twice thereafter leaving his uncompleted third term to his successor in the Congregational pastorate when he left this charge in 1855. He convened the first Teachers' Institute in Stark County and introduced a regular system of visiting and reporting schools with good results.

Beginning with November 29, 1846, the entries of the "Journal," as far as the history of the Toulon Congrega-

tional Church is concerned, are supplemented by the official records of this Church. From this date on, there is a singularly complete and continuous record of nearly all the important transactions of and happenings within the Church, each entry dated and attested at the close with the signature of clerk or pastor. In the "Journal," under date of November 6, 1846, we see that it was agreed by Rev. Wright and the faithful few that they would organize a Congregational Church at Toulon the last Sabbath of November. On November 28th, 1846, according to a paper written for the fiftieth anniversary by Eliza Rhodes Lyon (Mrs. C. M. S. Lyon), a little group of nine Christians met with Rev. Parker and Rev. Wright, in the cabin of Hugh Rhodes just a little ways south of town and planned the organization of this Church. On Sunday, November 29, 1846, this same little group with others met for religious services in the Court House and on this date completed the organization. Mrs. Lyon was one of this group. Thus begins the first entry in the official records of the Toulon Congregational Church, a Home Mission Church with a Home Missionary Pastor, Rev. S. G. Wright:

"November 29, 1846—In accordance with a previous notice, Revs. L. H. Parker and S. G. Wright met with a few brethren at the Court House in Toulon, and after a sermon by Brother Parker to a large and attentive congregation, the brethren were duly organized into a Church, and adopted the appended Confession of Faith, Covenant and Rules."

The names of the brethren are then given. They were Jonathan Rhodes and wife, Hannah; Hugh Rhodes and wife, Julia; Mrs. Elizabeth Rhodes; Giles C. Dana and wife, Mary A.; Sophronia Eliza Rhodes (the Eliza Rhodes Lyon referred to above); and Franklin Rhodes. The Confession of Faith, Covenant and Rules follows this list of members, a statement that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed after the organization, and the entry is closed with the signature of "S. G. Wright, Acting Pastor."

To the seven members of the Rhodes family of this group of founders is placed the window in the east end of the present church audience room in loving memory of their great service. It is the gift of their direct descendants, many of



whom with other near relatives continue the service of the forefathers in the Church of to-day.

The little church, in those days very appropriately styled the "Rhodes Church," continued to meet at intervals for business meetings and Sunday religious services, at the homes of members or in the Court House, which served at that time as the meeting place for all denominations.

March 13, 1847—They made choice of Rev. S. G. Wright as pastor, Hugh Rhodes and Giles C. Dana as deacons, and Hugh Rhodes as clerk. Rev. Wright acted as pastor from the beginning, but on this date was so elected as a matter of form.

March 14, 1847, nine more members were received, viz: Mrs. Matilda Hall; Miss Eliza Jane Hall; Mr. Orrin Rhodes and wife, Sarah; Mr. Robert Nicholson and wife, Sarah Ann; Mr. John Pollock and wife, Mary; and Mrs. Jane Bradley. These were the first to unite with the Church after its organization.

July 17, 1847, the first consecration of children in baptism occurred. The children so consecrated were Mary Emily Rhodes and Rebecca Jane Pollock.

In March, 1848, Rev. S. G. Wright moved from "Nigger's Point" to Toulon, and for some years thereafter made this town his home and the headquarters for his labors throughout the County, his field having been narrowed in 1846 to this county only. This gave him a chance to strengthen the work at Toulon and lay a good foundation. Toulon was one of the later towns to grow up, not being laid off as a town until 1841. Rev. Wright was led to make this town the center of his labors, he naively remarks in his "Journal," because of all his places of labor it was the least religious and yet it always gave him a good congregation.

Slowly, very slowly, grew the little Church within the next few years, nursed into strong and vigorous life with steady courage, tender wisdom, and infinite patience by this brave old pioneer who blazed a path in the wilderness and made an highway for his God. The country was new and sparsely settled and its people were poor, but out of their poverty they gave of the fruits of their toil and self-sacrifice unto the Lord for all His benefits toward them.

August 24, 1849, the first steps were taken towards building a house of worship, "a meeting house" as they styled it then, an audacious undertaking for a handful of people who were trying to build their own homes and improve their farms, receiving almost nothing for their produce at a distant market. Supplies were hauled from the Illinois River, across country, over unbridged streams and sloughs and through swamps. The members raised what money they could, the trustees borrowed what they could, which was \$200 loaned from the Church Building Fund for Congregational Churches in Illinois Central Association, and finally December 13, 1851, the "Church" first met in the new home which was only partially finished. It was unpainted; the stone foundation was incomplete; the walls had only one coat of plaster; and the room was seated with rough boards and planks on supports. Thus was reared the first Church edifice of any denomination in Stark County.

Music early became an important part of the Church's worship, very crude at first, no doubt, but gradually developing into a real devotional act, giving the atmosphere of quiet, prayerful reverence which is characteristic of the service of today.

C. B. Donaldson is mentioned, in 1853, as the first chorister and the Church is urged to "assist him in that act of devotion all in their power." William Kellogg, the next chorister, introduced an innovation, a violin, the first musical instrument used in this church. The choir in those days occupied elevated seats in the rear of the Church, and when the congregation arose at the singing, they all reversed "to face the music." H. P. Perry was the next chorister, and a second innovation now occurred. A little melodeon was loaned by the pastor over Sunday and Miss Eliza Wright was the first organist.

This Church from its beginning always took advance ground on all moral reforms, including the anti-slavery question and the temperance question. In its opposition to slavery it stood alone for many years. Even ministers in those days were not abolitionists. On January 21, 1854, it voted to hold prayer meetings once a month on behalf of the oppressed and down-trodden in bondage, and on September 2,

1854, the following resolutions were adopted: "We also deem American Slavery wholly unjustifiable and at war with the plainest precepts of the New Testament. Therefore, we feel bound to set ourselves in all practical ways against it, and are resolved:

1. We will not knowingly allow any slave holder, or apologist for American Slavery, to occupy our pulpit or dispense to us the sacrament.

2. We will sustain no society or public print that we believe sanctions or apologizes for American Slavery.

These sentiments in the years that followed became popular, the most bitter opponents of anti-slavery to begin with, almost without exception, finally becoming convinced of its moral justice, but it cost something to avow them in 1854 and vastly more in 1842 when but two anti-slavery votes were cast in the County, one by Rev. Wright, the other by Hugh Rhodes.

In this same year, strong temperance resolutions were also passed, and similar ones are recorded at a later period, in the year 1867.

The stand taken by this little body on these matters retarded its growth, numerically, for some years, but it outlived this opposition and despite the poverty and struggles of these formative years gradually moved onward to self-support and permanency.

December 9, 1854, Rev. S. G. Wright asked the Church to consider his resignation as pastor, in order that he might accept an agency for the Home Missionary Society of the Northwest. After further consideration later on in council with other nearby churches, it was decided to accept Rev. Wright's resignation and he was thus freed for service in more needy fields.

January 7, 1855, Rev. Wright preached his farewell sermon and Rev. R. C. Dunn was called on this same date at a salary of \$400; he declined to accept an additional \$100 from the Home Missionary Society.

Rev. Dunn was a man of much education and culture. He graduated from Knox College with the second class graduated by that institution, travelled and taught for a few years, then took up the study of law, but in the midst of his legal

studies felt a call to the ministry; so he commenced study in Union Theological Seminary in New York and for three years, there, lived over again all the self-denials and struggles of his college life. After a year of pleasant ministerial labor in western New York, he returned to his beloved West, but for months every door of labor seemed closed to him until Rev. S. G. Wright, who had been his pastor in his boyhood days and ever after a warm friend recommended him to his Church.

His early experiences here were much like those of his predecessor; his work as pastor extended all over the County, and he generally preached at, at least, one out-post regularly. He also succeeded Rev. Wright as school commissioner and served, too, as trustee of the town corporation and as president of the board. He could truly record: "I felt that I was not only a member of the Congregational Church, and its pastor, but a member of the community, and interested in all its interests, in schools, in trees, in public works, in literary matters, in moral enterprises, in railroads, in all things \* \* \* My heart, and time, and purse have been drawn out for every object of charity, or of public enterprise \* \* \* I have spoken to the public in various forms and addresses several thousands of times. I have canvassed the county for schools, for temperance, and for the country. I have gone to all parts, attending funerals and weddings, picnics, conventions and meetings of every sort."

He was elected to the Illinois Legislature in 1864, and in that body he introduced and secured the passage of the Bill which expunged the notorious "Black Laws" from the Statutes of the State, the Church granting him leave of absence on salary to perform this service for our country.

In 1866, still during Rev. Dunn's pastorate, the original church building was enlarged somewhat and re-dedicated, October 21.

The twelve years of this pastorate were very fruitful in many ways. The young Church during the first year returned a little over \$100 to the Home Missionary Society, and thus commenced to gain confidence in itself. It also gradually gained in numerical strength. The "Sabbath School," as it was called in those days, also grew in numbers and interest.

With prosperity also came affliction. These were the troublous days of the Civil War, and at one time, not a single able-bodied man of the congregation was left at home, while many a home was left desolate and many a place in the Church left unfilled because of those who never returned.

During all these years of busy labor, Rev. Dunn was constantly handicapped by ill health and finally, in 1861, feeling that, on this account, he stood in the way of his Church's full development, he presented his resignation, but receiving so many assurances of the acceptability of his labors, he did not press the resignation. His health, however, continuing uncertain, he again presented his resignation on December 1, 1866, and this time it was accepted. He speaks thus feelingly in his annual report for this year, of his long period of service among us: "As this is the last report I shall be permitted to make to this Church, probably the last to any church—as this day completes the twelve years of my pastorate among you—it is not without emotion that I complete my task and close my report. I have really known no other church than this. Almost all my active ministerial life has been here. Here I have found friends and received kind attentions and we have taken sweet counsel together. When my resignation is accepted the pleasant relation ceases. May "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "

After a brief period of rest, he again entered the ministry, although he had little hope of doing so when he resigned this charge, and after a year of much appreciated service in the Church at Oneida, he died very suddenly, in the midst of his duties, as he had always ardently desired that he might do, in the very prime of life. Verily "the life cut short may be the life crowned." He lies at rest in our cemetery here in Toulon, and the window in the west end of the main audience room of the present Church is placed to his memory by his son.

Rev. R. L. McCord was elected pastor August 3, 1867. It is to his memory and that of his brother-in-law, Judge W. W. Wright, of beloved memory in this Church, a nephew of the first pastor, Rev. S. G. Wright, that the north window in the

main audience room is dedicated by the McCord and Wright families.

Rev. McCord was "a man gentle, sympathetic, benignant, and gracious, surcharged with pastoral feeling" of whom one of his parishioners has said, "He earned his salary by the way he met people on the street."

It was during his pastorate that Rev. Willis C. Dewey, who became a member of this Church in 1863, was examined and ordained here for the work of a foreign missionary and sent to Turkey, from whence in the midst of bloody massacres and dire persecutions, fearless and undaunted, he sent back the message. "The place of duty is the place of safety." However, he was spared for many years of effective service in that country.

Rev. McCord, it was also, who gave the right hand of fellowship to that most distinguished son of this Church, Dr. Harry P. Dewey, of Minneapolis, whose name is named throughout this country wherever Congregationalism is known.

After a long pastorate of nearly eleven years, Rev. McCord presented his resignation to take effect April 15, 1878, and Rev. J. C. Myers succeeded him.

November 29, 1879, the Church observed its thirty-third anniversary with a reunion and supper. On this occasion, Rev. McCord was present and read an interesting historical sketch of the Church and its work during his pastorate and reminiscences were given by different members.

During the next few years, the financial condition of the Church became very encouraging and its finances ever since have been on a very sound basis.

On July 1, 1882, the subject of a new Church or remodeling the old one was brought up by the Board of Trustees, as the old building was inadequate for the increased membership and the needs of modern church work. The congregation voted to build a new church and the final arrangements were made for letting the contract on September 14, 1882.

In the midst of these preparations, Rev. Myers received an unexpected and unsolicited call to another church and asked to be released from this charge where he had now

served nearly five years. His request was granted on March 24, 1883.

The first Sabbath services in the new Church were held on November 18, 1883, in charge of Rev. S. J. Rogers, who supplied the pulpit on that date, and was a little later, November 21, 1883, called to the pastorate. The building was dedicated with appropriate services on January 3, 1884. Its total cost was \$5,352.61, and of this amount, at the date of dedication, \$4,121.65 had been paid in, in cash, leaving a debt of \$1,230.96.

The few years of Rev. Rogers' pastorate were years of financial improvement, in contributions to local expenses and benevolent contributions, both, of an increased interest in the services, and of peace and unity, so that the general condition of the Church was very prosperous.

May 22, 1886, Rev. Rogers resigned to accept a call to Paxton, Illinois, and Rev. J. H. Dixon commenced work here about July 1, of the same year.

At the annual meeting, December 3, 1887, the Church was reported by the trustees as free of all debt, and the pastor reported renewed life in old organizations and the establishment of new ones. In 1891, the Manse was built at a cost of \$2,705.07. The years of Rev. Dixon's pastorate, of a little over six years, were years of steady growth in membership, in attendance, and in spiritual interest. He was especially good in children's and young people's work, and in all those relations with his people which are covered by the word "pastoral," living constantly and steadily an uncontradicted profession among all kinds of people.

His son, Rev. Will Dixon, who united with this Church, also, when his parents did, is another of the youths trained in this Church who have given their lives to Christian service. He is doing effective work in the Congregation ministry.

June 25, 1892, Rev. Dixon presented his resignation and Rev. George Francis of Ontario, Canada, was called August 24, of the same year.

Rev. Francis found a well-organized church when he came and devoted himself not so much to the introduction of new methods as to the use of those already in existence, with good results. The membership steadily gained from year to year during his period of service of over nine years, without resort

to any special meetings or conspicuous methods of any kind. He proved to be a highly efficient and many-sided pastor, being much interested in the community's life, particularly in the educational field, and was, with prominent laymen of this Church and other Churches, among the chief promoters of the old Academy, the forerunner of good secondary education in this community.

.. On Sunday, November 29, 1896, Founders' Day, the Church celebrated her fiftieth anniversary, a notable occasion. The principal address of the morning service was made by Judge W. W. Wright, who reviewed the history of the Church and gave many interesting reminiscences, full of information and inspiration. A paper of reminiscence written by Eliza Rhodes Lyon (Mrs. C. M. S. Lyon), one of the two charter members still living at that time, the other being Mrs. Elizabeth Rhodes, was also read, together with letters of congratulation from former pastors and members. The principal address of the evening was given by the pastor, Rev. Francis, on the history of Congregationalism in this country, beginning with its start at Plymouth Rock and widening out until it embraced the whole country. A reception on Monday evening following closed this celebration of our Golden Jubilee.

January 2, 1901, the trustees reported the completion of an addition and a thorough repairing of the whole Church building at a cost of \$3,796.31, including estimated interest, and that they had received pledges to cover this amount in full.

Rev. Francis presented his resignation on December 1, 1901, to the regret of both Church and community, to accept a call to McGregor, Iowa. Some of his remarks on this occasion, when he reviewed his relations with this people, were as follows:

"As a church you have been worthy of my best physical, mental, and spiritual powers . . . I have always been proud of our Sunday School, in its study of the Word, in its good order, in its liberal support of itself and in its benevolent contributions. The Christian Endeavor Society has ever been a vigorous organization and a right arm of strength to the pastor . . . Not the least important in the work of our Church has been the music. It has done much to deepen the worship, to



give suitable variety to the service, and to strengthen the pastor's effort. I shall never forget to the day of my death the choir of this Church, a choir whose genial faces and sweet voices have been seen and heard in their proper places with exceptional regularity, a choir that has never had a word of difficulty, during all these years; the best I have ever had, and one which is seldom equalled. Looking at this Church as a whole, whatever faults it may have, it can be said of it that it is not a difficult one with which to work, that there are no factions, that it is conservative, that it has the missionary spirit, and that it is Christian in character, that its officers are intelligent, kind-hearted Christian men at all times ready to help."

March 23, 1902, Rev. G. W. Rexford was called and resigned March 23, 1904, giving a short pastorate of two years. Though short, Rev. Rexford's pastorate was one of much accomplishment, as he was a very energetic pastor and made friends quickly and easily. His work among the young people of the Church was especially gratifying.

June 5, 1904, Rev. J. M. Sutherland was called. Rev. Sutherland was a thorough scholar and a remarkable pulpit man, but he holds his place to-day in the affectionate memories of his people, more because of his fine Christian qualities, than on account of his intellectual abilities, remarkable as those were. He presented his body "a living sacrifice," day by day, "holy acceptable unto God." He was patient, self-sacrificing, and utterly incapable, seemingly, of feeling any personal resentment. He resigned in the latter part of the year 1908, leaving the Church in a spirit for work and with many tender memories of his unflinching devotion.

Early in 1909, Rev. C. E. Stebbins came to us for three years. This gave us another short pastorate, but Rev. Stebbins' easy manners and quietly cordial ways, together with his thorough acquaintance with all departments of Church work and life made his term of service a very useful one in strengthening the Church, particularly on its organization side. The generous hospitality of the Manse is one of the pleasant memories of this pastorate.

In 1910, the addition called "the kitchen" was completed and the Church building put in general repair throughout.

On February 16, 1913, Rev. C. A., Parmiter was extended a call. Rev. Parmiter was at that time studying in Chicago, and the pulpit was being supplied until he could come on a little later in the year.

Then suddenly a great calamity befell us. Early Sunday morning, March 2, 1913, the Church with all furniture, fixtures, and contents was completely destroyed by fire, the total loss being about \$10,000, with insurance to cover only half that amount. The fire was first discovered shortly before four o'clock, and at that time was burning under the entire basement so that by the time the citizens were aroused and responded to the alarm, the entire structure was doomed. The night was bitterly cold, the thermometer registering below zero, while a strong wind was blowing from the northwest.

Mr. W. A. Newton, who lived a block northwest of the Church, when he arose early to fix his furnace saw what he took to be a fire. Hastily dressing, he went to see what it was and found the entire basement in flames. He sounded the fire alarm at once, and it was not long before several hundred people were on the grounds, but it was soon seen that the entire structure was past saving and it would be hard work to protect the adjoining buildings.

It was perhaps the most spectacular fire that ever occurred in Toulon. Thousands of burning embers were carried high in the air by the strong wind, and had snow not covered the roofs of all the houses nearby, it is not unlikely that Toulon would have had one of the worst conflagrations in history. Burning pieces of wood a foot square or more were carried in the air by the wind; many of them lit on various houses, and nearby buildings were thickly covered with these burning pieces. Some of these embers were carried two and three miles in the country by the heavy wind. The origin of the fire is unknown, but probably it came from an over-heated furnace.

Thus in a few brief hours disappeared the old frame Church home of so many precious memories and cherished associations. The loss was especially hard to bear as the building had had a great deal of expense put on it in recent years in the way of remodelling and repair, and was in excellent con-

dition so that it would have been entirely adequate for the needs of the congregation for years to come.

However, the fire was scarcely over, when the matter of replacing the old Church was being considered, informally, and steps were immediately taken for the erection of a new and modern structure. March 23, 1913, in regular business session the membership unanimously voted to build a new brick church on the spot where the old one stood, and a finance committee and building committee were appointed to co-operate with the trustees in this undertaking. On May 13, 1913, the set of plans recommended by the building committee was provisionally adopted and the finance committee directed to proceed with their canvass of the membership and congregation for subscriptions. In a very short time the total amount called for by the original contract was pledged and the corner stone was laid on December 7, 1913, less than ten months from the date of the fire.

While this work was going on the Church met in McClenahan's Hall for services for a short time; then the Christian Church very thoughtfully offered to share their house of worship with us, as they were without a pastor and we were without a church home and the two congregations worshipping together for nearly a year proved to be mutually helpful to one another in the various phases of church life.

The new "First Congregational Church of Toulon" was dedicated Thursday evening, October 15, 1914, just about seventeen months from the date of the fire. The night was stormy and the roads all but impassable, but all the six hundred seats were filled and many were compelled to stand.

A beautiful and impressive program had been arranged by the pastor, Rev. Parmiter. The first part was styled, "Taking Possession of the House" and the second part, "The Act of Dedication." This second part was sub-divided into two parts—"The Approach" and "Setting Aside the House."

The ministers who took part in this service were: Rev. Harry P. Dewey, of Minneapolis, the speaker of the evening; Rev. Charles E. Stebbins, former pastor; some ministers of nearby Congregational Churches, Rev. E. S. Carr, of Chilli-cothe, Rev. J. R. Stead, of Galva, and Rev. William Moore, of Wyoming; the pastors of the local churches, Rev. R. T.

Ballew of the Methodist, and Rev. C. C. Colby of the Baptist, with Mr. W. F. Nicholson, representing the Christian Church, which was without a pastor at the time; and the pastor, Rev. C. A. Parmiter.

The choir and organist rendered beautiful music and Mr. Arthur Walters, of Wyoming, assisted with a solo.

The sermon of the evening by Dr. Harry P. Dewey, than whom no other could have given better expression to the memories of the past and the hopes of the future, was a moving address.

The building committee reported cash, pledges and insurance sufficient to cover the cost of the building, with the exception of the pipe organ, which the committee had decided to install after the canvass for funds was made, thus adding somewhat to the cost planned for in the original contract. The total expenditure by the Church, exclusive of various memorial gifts made by individuals in the way of furnishings and decorations, and exclusive of interest on deferred payments, was reported as \$26,048.46. The total final cost would probably be about \$30,000.

The services the following Sunday all reflected the dedicatory spirit. The morning service was the first regular reunion and worship service; at noon a Church School rally was held; at 6 o'clock, the Endeavor meeting, at 7 o'clock a service of remembrance to cherished associations. At this last named service, Mr. John F. Rhodes, a guest, who had been actively identified with the work of this church for years, read a paper reviewing the history of the Church and Rev. Mary Wright, returned missionary and retired minister, a daughter of our Rev. S. G. Wright, told a number of interesting incidents of early day church life.

Friday evening, October 16, an "At Home" was given. At this there was a short program after which light refreshments were served and the whole building thrown open to the inspection of the people of the community. On Tuesday evening, October 20, a pipe organ recital was given by Mr. Palmer Christian, of Chicago.

The present Church Building of brown brick with white stone trim is a fine addition to Toulon. It is located on the corner of Henderson and Thomas Streets, the site of the

old Church. It is massive in appearance and beautifully and artistically proportioned, on the exterior, and chaste and dignified in its interior decorations and furnishings; while at the same time, it is thoroughly practical and constructed of only the best and most durable of materials. One does not weary of it in the least with daily familiarity.

It is fitted for worship, for religious education, and for social life. The main audience room is on the north; it has a raised floor and a circular arrangement of seats so that the Church School Assembly on the south can be thrown in with this room to provide extra seating space for special occasions. The organ and pulpit are thus at the center of the whole ground floor when thrown together. Separate class rooms are provided off the balcony built above the Church School Assembly as well as downstairs. There is a Primary Assembly, with platform, in the basement at the north side. This can be thrown together with the dining room on the south to make one large social room, which if seated to capacity will hold about two hundred at table. There is a modern kitchen to the southwest, back of the dining room.

But a church cannot live on high days and soon after the dedication, we were swung back into the routine again, while our new pastor, who had been with us only a little over a year when the new church was dedicated, found many arduous duties and wearing responsibilities which were much more important than the raising up of brick and stone. He devoted himself from the beginning, not to the material interests of the Church, very properly considering that to be the layman's appropriate service, but as he said in his letter accepting this charge that his purpose would be, he strove ever "to encourage and build up the people of Toulon in those phases of life which fall to the Christian Church as the particular reason for her existence."

Rev. Parmiter possessed in a very marked degree the power to grow in his work. He was never static. During his five years here, he performed three very worthwhile services for us. He so ordered the services of the Church as to give them beauty and dignity and reverence, so that they became an expression of real devotional feeling and a real act of worship; he insisted on the graded lessons and a real educa-

tional program in the Church School; and finally, by the contagion of his own supreme faith in the ultimate value and triumph of Christianity, he had a very marked influence in deepening the spiritual life of the intellectually strong, but spiritually weak and indifferent among his congregation. It can be said of his work, as a whole, that it is the kind that does not need to be done over.

Rev. Parmiter left us just at the close of 1917 and Rev. Treverton Warren came to us very soon thereafter for a short pastorate of a year and a half's duration. Rev. Warren was a very energetic pastor, however, and accomplished much considering his short period of service. There were twenty additions to the Church during this time, and an active campaign for the Mid-West Educational Fund was put on with good results. This was the period, too, when we sent many of our young men to the Great War, one of whom, Burt Ward, died in service. However, the sufferings of this time for our Church families and our Church were very slight in comparison with the times of the Civil War.

Rev. M. J. Norton, our present pastor, came to us on January 27, 1920, and is now just about to complete his second year of service with us. How patient and loving that service has been, we are all witnesses. He has been to us all a radiant example of Christian fortitude in the many trials that have been his since he came among us, continuing always to comfort others even though he himself most needed comfort.

In spite of many interruptions, we have in this short time accomplished much together as pastor and people. There have been fifty-four additions to the membership since Rev. Norton's coming, most of them due to his efforts, while the officers of the Church, under his inspiration, succeeded in raising for the year 1920, in round numbers \$3,000 for benevolences, including the Emergency Fund of \$1,500 in connection with the Inter Church World Movement, practically the same amount for local expenses, and about \$700 additional to pay off the remaining indebtedness on the new Church building. The total contributions for 1921 will probably be between \$5,000 and \$6,000, when the budget is finally made up at the end of the calendar year. These things, however, which are

conspicuous results are not on that account most important. As some one has said, it is not the chief business of a Church to add members to its roll, nor, we might add, is it to raise money alone, but rather to make evil men good and good men better. But we think we can say of the past two years, also, that there has been a noticeable increase in spiritual life among the many who already bear the name of Christian. And this is the sole reason for the existence of the Christian Church upon Earth.

So as we look back over this seventy-five years of history, a long past for a middle west church, and note the more conspicuous events in the history of this Church, we realize that many things which are of greatest value, things of the inner life and spirit, are things of which no adequate record could be made in days gone by and that it cannot be made now. Nevertheless, we hope that shining through this record of the things that are seen, can be traced the gleam of the animating purpose of this long line of successors to the covenant, since its establishment by that little group of nine and the two pastors who led them, and that it will ever go on before us, in the years to come, reminding us of the toil and sacrifice that have consecrated this spot and made of this House none other than the House of God and the very Gate of Heaven. "Surely the Lord is in this place."

In presenting this beautiful story of the saints of bygone days who rest from their labors while "their works do follow them," and also of those who are still laborers in the vineyard, we are humbly conscious of many failings. The path that gradually lengthens, and widens as it lengthens, from 1846 on down to 1921, is not one on which only the clear white radiance of eternity shines. This Church, as is true of any other body of Christians, has had in its membership many different kinds of people. It has had the weak and the sinful; it has had the cold and indifferent and the trivial, the so-called "nominal Christians;" it has had those who grew weary and discouraged and gave up and tried no more; it had had those who have fallen and risen again; it has had, also the radiant lives, those who have kept ever in mind that

they "that are strong ought always to bear the infirmities of the weak."

As to pastors, this church has been unusually fortunate. They have been, on the whole, strong and devoted servants of the Lord. To quote from Judge W. W. Wright: "In every good work they have led the Church in a progressive age full up to the advance in the progress of the times." However, they have not been faultless any more than our laymen have. They have not all, at all times, and on all occasions, been wise and good, but they have, nevertheless, led us by all the way that we should go with fortitude and courage and are and will always be a tender and inspiring memory, encouraging us to strive to see in those who shall come after them like splendid qualities and to remember to bear with them as we would have them bear with us.

When we look back over the lives of our departed friends and relatives, the general trend of whose lives has been upward, we find always that our minds do not dwell much on the things that were unlovely in them, but that our attention is taken up mainly by the things that are of good report. So in looking back over these three-quarters of a century of life in this Church, we find ourselves remembering with gratitude the fine and splendid things in its story, which do, after all, predominate, in reality, as surely as they do in idealized reminiscence, and viewing very tenderly all errors and mistakes.

Over a thousand names have been on our roll since organization. Most of these have, of course, passed on to the world beyond, and many also have moved from this community, and become connected with other churches. From this roll, we have representatives in Christian service, in the work of the ministry and on the mission field, as we have noted in the course of this narrative. Rev. Willis C. Dewey and Rev. Harry P. Dewey were born and brought up here, and made their profession of faith in this Church. Rev. Will Dixon united with us by letter, but grew into young manhood here, so that the formative years of his life, religiously, were passed under the influence of this Church. Miss Diantha Dewey, daughter of Rev. Willis C. Dewey, who after her



father's death went to Turkey to take his place, was also for a short time a member of this Church, uniting by letter while she was in this country to obtain her education, as Toulon was the old family home. Miss Margaret Perry who made her profession of faith here also, married Rev. Francis and was a most efficient co-worker with him in his ministry. Miss Ruby Rhodes, another daughter of the Church, a direct descendant of one of the Rhodes founders, married Rev. Hillis and is busily engaged with him in his work as student pastor in the University of California. There have been others in such service with whom we feel very close association, although we cannot claim them as directly representative of us since their names were never on our roll; the family of Rev. S. G. Wright, our founder, has two such representatives, Rev. Mary Wright, mentioned above, and Rev. Alfred C. Wright, in our mission work at Guadalajara, Mexico; the family of former pastor, Rev. McCord, also has two such representatives, Dr. James McCord, who spent much of his boyhood here, for many years in the medical mission work in Africa, and Miss Mamie McCord, who married a missionary, Mr. Larkin, and gave her life to this field of service. These with many others who in the ordinary walks of life, have been just as truly servants of the Most High, have laid foundations of spiritual life for those who are yet to come. The present total membership is two hundred and ninety-five. Of these twenty-five are non-resident, leaving an active membership of two hundred and seventy. The decrease in this roll in the past few years is only apparent, not real, as the custom of the Church now is to keep in touch with non-resident members and urge them to take out their letters to the churches in the communities where they live. So it is the non-resident list that is decreasing all the time, not the resident, active membership. Who can measure the influence of this group of people, of both the past and the present here in this locality or in other places, either in the period of their own lives' duration or in the memories they have left or will leave behind them?

So, on this the occasion of the observance of the first seventy-five years of the life of the First Congregational

Church of Toulon, it is fitting that we, as Church and Congregation, pause a moment to look back into the past from whence we came and, at the same time, forward into the future to catch, if it may be, some vision of the tasks that lie before us. Thus reverently pausing and consecrating ourselves anew, as we did seven years ago, when we first entered this present House, we now re-dedicate it, tangible and visible symbol of that which is intangible and invisible, to the memory of our beloved dead, "who live again in minds made better by their presence," and to the welfare of the living, both "those whose ways are good and those whose ways are evil;" to the glory of God the Father, and the honor of Jesus the Christ, the son of the living God. Amen.

PASTORS.

1846-1921.

Rev. Samuel G. Wright.

Rev. Richard C. Dunn.

Rev. Robert L. McCord.

Rev. John C. Myers.

Rev. Samuel J. Rogers.

Rev. Julian H. Dixon.

Rev. George A. Francis.

Rev. George W. Rexford

Rev. John M. Sutherland.

Rev. Charles E. Stebbins.

Rev. Charles A. Parmiter.

Rev. Treverton Warren.

Rev. Milton J. Norton.

"On deep foundation have we reared  
 To thee, O God, this house of prayer;  
 'Mid storms of life that men have feared  
 Abides our faith in thy sure care.

“This house is thine, its portals wide,  
Open to all by day and night,  
Bid rich and poor in Christ confide  
And walk together in his light.

“Within these walls thy spirit give,  
A temple of each heart to make,  
That we may serve Thee while we live  
In serving men for Christ’s own sake.”